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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [UNSC](#) [ETTC](#) [ER](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: ERITREA TO HOST EASTERN FRONT NEGOTIATIONS

REF: KHARTOUM 00923

CLASSIFIED BY: AMB Scott H. DeLisi, for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: With the announcement that Eritrea will host talks between the Eastern Front and Sudan's Government of National Unity, speculation has risen on whether we may finally see a resolution to instability in eastern Sudan. An Egyptian Diplomat provided additional information on the recent Eritrean delegation visit to Khartoum, preconditions for possible negotiations in Eritrea and his views on why the GNU finally agreed to Eritrea as a mediator. End Summary.

¶2. (C) After the Sudanese government's public confirmation that Eritrea had been asked to host negotiations between the Government of National Unity (GNU) and the Eastern Front, ConOff met with Egyptian DCM Hussein El Sayed Mohamed El Shaar (protect) to discuss the recent Eritrean visit to Khartoum and why the GNU finally agreed to Eritrea as a mediator after a number of failed attempts by the Libyans to get the GNU and Eastern Front to the negotiating table.

¶3. (C) The Eritrean Delegation arrived in Khartoum on April 10, after considerable back channeling by Rashaida Free Lions (RFL) Leader Mabruuk Mubarak Salim, Sudanese VP Ali Osman Taha and Eritrean Sudan Watcher Abdallah Jabir over the past few weeks, Hussein stated. During the visit which lasted three (3) days, the Eritreans met with the GNU Joint Commission and other senior Sudanese officials including Nafie al Nafie, and were asked to take a leading role in resolving the problems in eastern Sudan as well as in Darfur (see reftel). It was explained to ConOff that SPLM National Assembly Chair Yassir Arman would come to Asmara in the coming week and accompany Abdallah Jabir to Abuja to put pressure on the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM).

¶4. (C) Hussein claims that the GNU Joint Commission also provided the Eritrean delegation a four (4) point "Joint Vision" for negotiations:

-- the GNU and GSE would need to meet prior to the commencement of negotiations to establish preparatory measures focused on ensuring there was no negative propaganda or media coverage of the negotiations (Note: This should be easy in Eritrea where there is no free press and only two foreign journalists. End note.) Additionally, the GNU and GSE will need to agree to a cessation of hostilities around their joint border.

-- Eritrea would host negotiations as soon as possible, even as early as within the next two weeks Hussein believes the GSE will probably host the talks outside of Asmara, possibly in Keren.

-- The parties to negotiations would be the Eastern Front and GNU. DUP Leader Mirghani would not/not be apart of negotiations and his call for an internal eastern conference would not be considered. (When asked whether the Eastern Front included the JEM, Hussein did not know at this time, however in past discussions with Beja and Rashaida representatives in Asmara, it was clear that the JEM have already had their day in Abuja and would not be invited to take part in these negotiations.

-- the GSE will work with both sides to decide which international observers would be invited to be present.

15. (C) When asked why the GNU has finally agreed to accept Eritrea as a venue and mediator for negotiations on eastern Sudan, Hussein said he believes there are two reasons. First, he thinks that pressure from the international community (mainly the Norwegians and U.S.) to resolve problems in the east, before they get worse was an important factor. In particular, he feels that recent senior Norwegian visits, as well as those of a number of U.S. officials to the region, has helped to push the GNU into accepting negotiations and a mediator that the Eastern Front can agree to. Additionally, he believes that recent tensions and clashes in eastern Sudan since the January incident around Hamesh Koreib have raised enough concern over the potential internationalization of the eastern issue to goad the GNU into action.

16. (C) Comment: While there have been a number of attempts over the past eight months to get the GNU and Eastern Front to the negotiating table in Tripoli all have failed for a variety of reasons. Recent fighting in the east, however, has elevated the level of the GSE's concern and may have spurred the GSE to take a more constructive stance with the GNU at a time when, as Hussein suggests, the GNU may also have been more receptive to negotiations going forward. Unsurprisingly, the Egyptians tend to be more involved and interested in Sudan issues than most diplomatic missions here and usually have good access to information from both the Eritrean and Sudanese sides. That said, Post is skeptical of negotiations beginning within the next two weeks given logistical and organizational requirements to get them off the ground. Post will follow-up further with the Eastern Front, the GSE and the Norwegians to get a clearer picture of the next steps and of whether there any ways the USG might, along with other partners such as Norway, facilitate this effort.

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